

Office of Attorney General Terry Goddard



STATE OF ARIZONA
DEPARTMENT OF LAW
12 75 W. WASHINGTON STREET
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007-2926
WWW.AZAG.GOV

ANDREA M. ESQUER
PRESS SECRETARY
PHONE: (602) 542-8019
CELL PHONE: (602) 725-2200

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Terry Goddard Calls on Congress to Protect Residents from Identity Theft

(Phoenix, Ariz. – May 26, 2005) Attorney General Terry Goddard today called on the Arizona Congressional delegation to help protect Arizona residents from identity theft by removing Social Security numbers from Medicare, Veteran's and Department of Defense cards. Goddard shared his letter with seniors at the Desert West Senior Center in West Phoenix.

"Action to remove these numbers is seriously overdue," Goddard said. "Keeping them on Medicare cards is doing identity thieves a big favor."

According to the Federal Trade Commission, Arizona ranked first in ID theft complaints among the states last year, and metro Phoenix ranked No. 1 among all metropolitan areas in the country.

Goddard cited a November 2004 General Accounting Office report that noted Social Security numbers "are a lynchpin to other personal information held in a variety of records. The extent to which they are exposed to public view, of course, increases the likelihood that they will be misused for inappropriate mining of personal information, violation of privacy and identity theft."

The report warned that cardholders could be in jeopardy because they must have their cards with them at the point of service which increases the likelihood for accidental loss, theft or visual exposure."

The GAO recommendations included substituting another number for the Social Security number on recipients' cards and linking it to the actual Social Security number in a protected database.

Goddard cited Arizona's effort to prevent ID theft by issuing drivers' licenses without using a Social Security number. He also noted that health insurance providers no longer use Social Security numbers as ID numbers on health insurance cards.

more

Goddard was joined by area advocates in his call to remove Social Security numbers from Medicare identification cards.

"Identity theft for any individual is devastating and very stressful, but sadly such a event for an older adult is simply unacceptable in our society," said Laraine Stewart, Chief Operating Officer for the Area Agency on Aging. "We should not allow this essential document to become a gold mine for the bad actors in our society to misuse and benefit at the expense of our Medicare recipients."

"Fortunately, we haven't had any clients negatively impacted by fraudulent use of the Medicare card," said Guy Mikkelsen, General Manager and Chief Executive Officer of Foundation for Senior Living. "It's clear that a threat exists. We join the Attorney General in asking Congress to act before there are stories of misuse of the numbers on individual's Medicare card that truly harm individuals who may have few resources to overcome the negative impact of loss of one's identity."

The Arizona Attorney General's Office has launched several initiatives to educate consumers and prevent identity theft. The campaign includes brochures, bookmarks, videotapes and DVDs available in English and Spanish.

"But few, if any, prevention steps would have a more significant impact than removing Social Security numbers from Medicare and other federally issued cards," Goddard concluded.

For more information to prevent ID theft, please visit the Arizona Attorney General's Office Web site at www.azag.gov.

###